

Top Secret

219

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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE DAILY CABLE

Tuesday 18 April 1978

CG NIDC 78/090C

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State Dept. review completed

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National Intelligence Daily Cable for Tuesday, 18 April 1978

The NID Cable is for the purpose of informing senior US officials.

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SYRIA: Concern About Lebanon

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[] The US Embassy in Beirut reports that Christian attitudes toward the Syrians and Palestinians are hardening. Moderate Christian leaders are trying to restrain their followers from provoking a confrontation but some Christians are demanding total Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon.

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[] The Christian leadership is pressing the Lebanese Parliament to repudiate the Palestinians' right to maintain an armed presence in the country. Some extremist Christians reportedly hope for a renewal of all-out war against the Palestinians; they think that with Israeli support, the Syrians could be neutralized.

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[] The Syrians' problems in Lebanon have exacerbated political tensions in Syria. Syrian security forces last week

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instituted a major crackdown on Asad's internal opponents in an attempt to end terrorist activities that began shortly after Syria intervened in Lebanon in 1976.

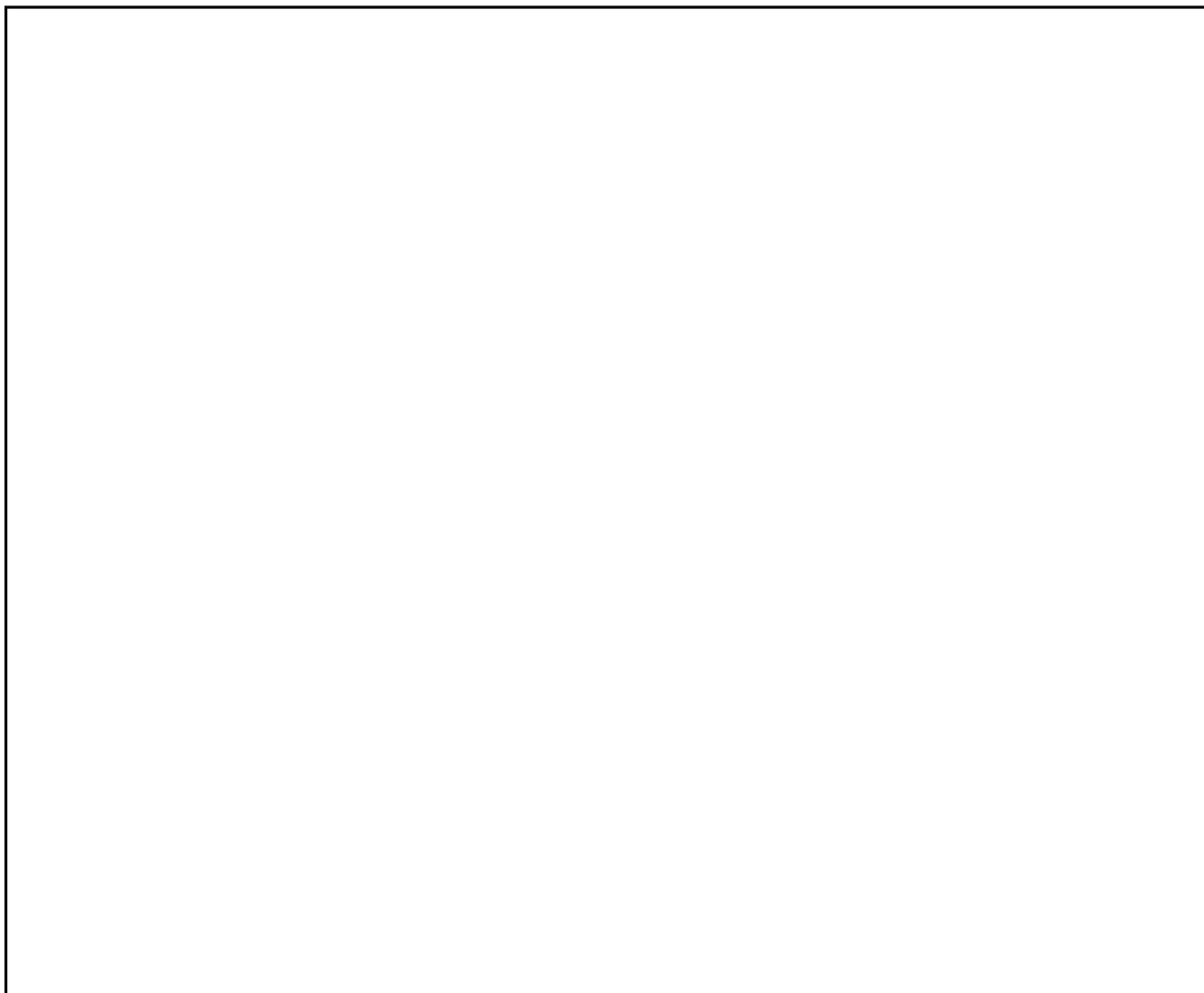
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[] The Syrians are aware of their dilemma. Asad's brother Rifaat recently argued that "we are committing suicide by our presence in Lebanon." Asad recognizes that a precipitate Syrian withdrawal would lead to chaos and a resumption of the civil war in Lebanon, and he will probably continue to try to muddle through to avoid a major crisis. []

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ZAIRE: Political Dismissals

25X1 [] In the wake of last month's trials and executions of those involved in coup plots, Zairian President Mobutu has undertaken a large-scale purge of military and intelligence officers. Although the purge will probably not have a serious impact over the short term on the Army's combat effectiveness, it will probably further lower morale and aggravate tribal differences.

25X1 [] Some 700 men--12 percent of the officer corps--are being dismissed because Mobutu has doubts about the loyalty of personnel from Zaire's eastern and southern provinces. These are the areas where disaffection with Mobutu is most deeply ingrained. There are unconfirmed reports that all Zairians from these regions are to be purged from government service--civil as well as military. The US Embassy in Kinshasa does not believe that a government-wide purge is in the offing, even though the state-owned copper company and the railroads have been under orders not to hire individuals from Shaba or East or West Kasai Province.

25X1 [] Mobutu periodically purges the military, but this purge is the largest in the memory of Embassy officers. Because

[redacted]

the purge apparently will not affect field grade officers and troop commanders, there probably will not be an immediate decrease in the combat effectiveness of the Zairian Army, although some of the country's best officers are reported to be among those marked for dismissal. Morale, already low, will be further hurt by Mobutu's action, and many loyal officers will undoubtedly be victimized.

25X1 [redacted] Most of those convicted in the coup trials were from Shaba and the Kasais. Given Zaire's history of deep tribal and regional differences, Mobutu's action will exacerbate the existing discontent. [redacted]

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SAUDI ARABIA: Abqaiq Oil Fire

25X1 [redacted] *Saudi Arabia is officially blaming a gas pipe leak for the explosion and fire on Saturday that killed three workmen and extensively damaged a gas and oil separator plant at Abqaiq.*

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25X1 [redacted] The damaged plant was the largest of five that separate crude oil produced at Abqaiq from natural gas before it is piped to the port of Ras Tanura. The plant was capable of handling more than 300,000 barrels of crude and 250 million cubic feet of natural gas a day, but reportedly had been operating well below capacity in recent months. Given the current weak demand for Saudi crude and government-imposed production ceilings, its loss will not reduce total production.

25X1 [redacted] Last year, two major fires extensively damaged facilities at Abqaiq and forced temporary sharp cutbacks in oil output. Although the latest accident will not have a similar impact, it will reinforce Saudi suspicions of inadequate maintenance procedures and safeguards at the oil facilities. [redacted]

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BRIEFS

Peru-USSR

25X1 [redacted] The USSR has deferred payments falling due on Peru's military debt until 1980. Peru was able to defer principal and

[redacted]

downpayments on its military debt due in 1978 and 1979 and part of the payments due in 1980. The total amount deferred was \$98 million in 1978-1979 and \$51.6 million in 1980.

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[redacted] Peru's Director of Public Credit Reus, who visited Moscow about three weeks ago, stated that Lima will continue to make interest payments of \$8 million annually and scheduled payments on "commercial debts" of about \$15 million per year.

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[redacted] The Peruvians had hoped to be able to defer payments on interest and commercial debts and thus did not obtain all they sought from the Soviets. It is not known what concessions Peru made to secure the USSR's cooperation on the military debt. [redacted]

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China-US

25X1 [] China has bought an additional 400,000 tons of US wheat, to be delivered between May and October. The sale follows last week's purchase of 600,000 tons, China's first purchase of US wheat since 1974. Market rumors of additional sales persist.

25X1 [] A disappointing grain crop last year has caused China to buy from the US //in addition to making large purchases from traditional suppliers--Canada and Australia. Canada has exhausted its surpluses, and Australia is unsure of the state of its new crop.// The US is the only exporter left with large surpluses. []

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